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RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHDC
RUEHGV/USMISSION GENEVA 1160
RUEHNO/USMISSION USNATO BRUSSELS BE
RUEHVEN/USMISSION USOSCE 3190
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK 2576
RUEHBS/USEU BRUSSELS
RUEHLMC/MILLENNIUM CHALLENGE CORP
RUMICEA/USCENTCOM INTEL CEN MACDILL AFB FL

UNCLAS BISHKEK 000036

SENSITIVE
SIPDIS

DEPT FOR SCA/CEN

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [KPAO](#) [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [SCUL](#) [KG](#)

SUBJECT: RUSSIAN PUBLIC DIPLOMACY IN KYRGYZSTAN UNDERWHELMS
LOCALS

11. (SBU) Post attended the ideologically-awkward opening of a "Russian Center" at Bishkek Humanities University on September 11, 2008, an attempt by Russia to increase its soft power in Kyrgyzstan. The center was unveiled by Russian Federation Council Speaker Sergei Mironov, Russkii Mir director Vyacheslav Nikonov, and Kyrgyz Minister of Education Ishengul Boljurova. It is the third such center in Kyrgyzstan, more than Russia has in any other country; other Russian centers are located in Kant, directly across from an American Corner, and Osh. A fourth is planned in Karakol. This latest center, which consists of two rooms full of books about Russian culture and history, cost 3 million rubles (about \$100,000) in construction and an unspecified amount in computers and other technology.

12. (SBU) Mironov praised the center as a way to learn more about Russia's great language and culture, and about how to study in Russia. Boljurova responded that there is indeed a large demand to learn Russian in Kyrgyzstan, but asked the Russians to focus more on creating economic links and jobs in Kyrgyzstan. Nikonov, whose Russkii Mir (Russian World) foundation runs these centers as part of a campaign to improve Russia's image abroad, argued that the Kyrgyz should welcome this center since they are part of a great civilization symbolized by the term Russkii Mir. He believes that the civilization is based on linguistic, ethnic, cultural and geographic ties to Russia.

13. (SBU) COMMENT: Russia is still well-regarded in Kyrgyzstan, based on the opportunities for employment it offers, its historical role in Kyrgyzstan's development, and the greater fear of other neighboring states. However, official Russian efforts to improve relations through the functionality of the Russian language and nostalgia for (ethnic Russian) Soviet triumphs were tepidly received by the largely ethnically Kyrgyz university audience and are likely to encounter resistance generally. Nikonov and the center offer little about Russia today, either as a model for Kyrgyzstan's future development or in enticement to rejoin this supposed civilization.

14. (SBU) These Russian centers appear to be modeled on American Corners, which offer users books in English on a wide range of topics, internet access, information about America, and are used as a platform for American-related cultural and educational programming. In Kyrgyzstan, there are five official corners managed by the Embassy and an additional seven American centers at universities which are supplied with materials by the Embassy but managed by the school. END COMMENT.
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